

REMARKS

Claims 5-11, 13, 18-24, and 26 are currently pending in the present application, with Claims 5 and 18 being amended and Claims 1-4, 12, 14-17, 25, and 27-30 being canceled. Reconsideration and reexamination of the pending claims are respectfully requested.

In an Office Action dated September 23, 2003, the Examiner indicated that all of the then-pending claims were in condition for allowance, but suspended the prosecution of the present application due to a potential interference with U.S. Patent No. 6,179,969 (Park et al.).

Applicants have canceled Claims 1-4, 12, 14-17, 25, and 27-30 and amended Claim 5 and 18. Applicants respectfully submit that the remaining pending claims, as amended, are directed to subject matter not claimed in the '969 patent and there are therefore no interfering claims. The last element of Claim 1 of the '969 patent requires that the circumferential width at the particular depth of the annular ring be equal to the width at the bottom surface of the annular ring and that the lower section extends vertically down and has a constant width. In contrast, independent Claims 5 and 18 require the width of the exhaust-passage opening be greater than the minimum width of the inner ring of the sloped process-chamber opening, as shown in Figure 10C of the present application. The amendments to the claims are supported by Figure 10C as well as lines 12-18 on page 25 of the present application.

Applicants note that, along with a communication filed on July 10, 2002, Applicants submitted a certified copy of the PCT application of the present application (PCT/JP99/01055) to perfect the claim of priority of the present invention under 35 U.S.C. § 120 to the date of March 4, 1999, thereby swearing behind the filing date of the '969 patent (April 22, 1999).


In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submit that all of the pending claims are in condition for allowance.

In the unlikely event that the transmittal letter is separated from this document and the Patent Office determines that an extension and/or other relief is required, Applicant(s) petition(s) for any required relief including extensions of time and authorizes the Assistant Commissioner to charge the cost of such petitions and/or other fees due in connection with the filing of this document to Deposit Account No. 03-1952 referencing docket no. 28503.20058.00.

Respectfully submitted,

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